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Eugene K. B. TAN

Singapore Management University, eugene@smu.edu.sg

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Soft Law and the Development of Norms and Trust in Countering the Terrorist Threat: Engaging the Faith Communities in Post-9/11 Singapore

Eugene K. B. Tan

On July 6, 2010, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) announced that a "self-radicalized," full-time national serviceman had been detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) since April 4, 2010. Muhammad Fadil bin Abdul Hamid (Fadil), age 20, would be detained under the ISA for two years in the first instance. According to the media statement, Fadil had become convinced that "it was his religious duty to undertake armed *jihad* alongside fellow militants and strive for martyrdom." According to local media reports, Fadil was the sixth known case of self-radicalization. Fadil was subsequently released on a Restriction Order on April 4, 2012.¹

EUGENE K. B. TAN (LL.B (Hons), National University of Singapore; MSc, London School of Economics and Political Science, JSM, Stanford University) is associate professor of law at the School of Law at Singapore Management University. Besides constitutional and administrative law, the author's interdisciplinary research interests include the mutual interaction of law and public policy, the regulation of ethnic conflict, and the government and politics of Singapore. This research was supported by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) Academic Research Fund (AcRF) Tier 1 grant. It builds on earlier work I published in *Law and Policy* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments, suggestions, and insights.

1. The media statement describes the Restriction Order in the following manner: "A person issued with a Restriction Order (RO) must abide by several conditions and restrictions. For example, he is not permitted to change his residence or employment, or travel out of Singapore, without the prior approval of the Director ISD. The individual issued with RO also cannot issue public statements, address public meetings or print, distribute, contribute to or be involved in any publication, duplicate or disseminate any audio or video recording, hold office in, or be a member of any organisation, association or group without the prior approval of Director ISD. He must also report to ISD at specified times and dates, and

Since 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on American soil, there have been regular announcements of the detention and release of, as well as the imposition of Restriction Orders on alleged terrorists in Singapore. These announcements have become routine and do not arouse much concern nor engender debate openly within the Singaporean polity. Nonetheless, self-radicalization is a matter of growing concern for the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (or *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* [MUIS]). In response to media queries, MUIS expressed its “deep concern” on radicalization through the Internet and other new media platforms. MUIS urged the Muslim Singaporean community to “remain constantly vigilant to the threat of self-radicalization in the community as the threat remains at a global level.” It also stated, “Violence and militancy have nothing to do with the teachings of Islam.” MUIS added, “We must treasure and safeguard the strong foundation of mutual respect, peace, and harmony in our multi-racial, multi-religious nation.”²

This relative calm stands in stark contrast to the anxiety and palpable panic following several rounds of arrests and detention of “home-grown” *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) terrorist suspects in Singapore under the ISA in late 2001 and early 2002. The atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust between Malay Muslims and non-Muslims then was palpable and disconcerting. But it should also be acknowledged that some uneasiness was expressed in discussions over Fadil’s detention by no fewer than four cabinet ministers.

In March 2013, another self-radicalized individual, Abdul Basheer Abdul Kader, was rearrested and placed under detention after he was found to have reverted to his past interest in undertaking militant *jihād* abroad. Abdul Basheer was first detained under the ISA in February 2007 after he had allegedly made specific plans to pursue militant *jihād* in Afghanistan. He was released three years later and had made some progress in reintegrating into society. There was little public concern when Abdul Basheer’s second detention was reported. Similarly, in 2015, the arrests and detentions of persons, including youths, influenced by ISIS’s online radical propaganda

present himself for counselling and/or interviews as required by the Director ISD. He may be re-detained should he fail to respect these conditions and restrictions.” See Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs medial statement “Detention, Imposition of Restriction Orders and Release Under the Internal Security Act, July 6, 2010, available at <https://www.mha.gov.sg/Newsroom/press-releases/Pages/Detention-Imposition-Of-Restriction-Orders-And-Release-Under-The-Internal-Security-Act-06-July-2010.aspx>.

2. See MUIS press statement of July 7, 2010, “Response to Media Enquiries on Detention, Imposition of Restriction Orders on 3 Individuals.” MUIS is a statutory board tasked with regulating Muslim religious affairs and advising the government in matters relating to Islam.

and who were making plans to fight in Syria or commit violent acts in Singapore have not raised a moral panic.³

It is a sign of the times. In the post-9/11 age, it is a cliché that states must take matters of faith seriously. Muslim minorities in many parts of the world are under “siege” or perceive themselves to be under a pall of suspicion, distrust, and danger. Yet, it is in such trying times that pluralistic societies are put through the litmus test of how resilient they are in coping and adapting to the changing faith and security landscape, particularly for the Muslim communities and the national security establishment. Questions have been raised over Islam’s compatibility with the contemporary world, the loyalty and integration of Muslim communities, and the viability of multiculturalism as an integrative mechanism and social glue.⁴ It would not be an overstatement to say that these are pivotal times that many multiracial and multireligious societies are encountering.

This article seeks to examine the interaction of politics with religion in Singapore, with special reference to its small but significant Muslim community since 9/11. In particular, it analyzes how Muslim Singaporeans are adapting and responding given that Islamist religious extremism and violence is presented as being “by far the most serious [security problem] that we have faced since the communist problem.”⁵ Having declared itself “an iconic target” for terrorists, Singapore is effectively gearing itself for the inevitability of a terrorist attack on its soil.⁶ In the aftermath of a terrorist attack, especially by homegrown perpetrators, the policymakers’ primary concern is the potential backlash against the minority Muslim community and the unraveling of Singapore’s social fabric.

In this article, I explore the increasing use of “soft law” (such as codes of conduct, guidelines) at the macro- and micropolicy level by the authorities as part of the regulatory mechanism in matters concerning religion. The government’s approach can be described as ideational in that it seeks to engender a shift in majority-minority/societal relations at one level and government and the Muslim community relations at another. These ideals embody the rules,

3. Since January 2002, more than sixty people, all men, have been detained under the ISA for their involvement in terrorism-related activities. As of July 9, 2014, more than four-fifths of those detained under the Internal Security Act since January 2002 for their involvement in terrorism-related activities have since been released after they were assessed to have been rehabilitated. Information provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore, on September 24, 2014 (correspondence on file with author).

4. On the situation in the United Kingdom, see Derek McGhee, *The End of Multiculturalism: Terrorism, Integration and Human Rights* (Berkshire, UK: Open University Press and McGraw-Hill, 2008).

5. “Not the Terror, but the Fallout,” *Today*, February 10, 2006.

6. “Threat of Terror Strike Far from Over,” *The Straits Times*, August 28, 2004.

institutions, and norms to self-regulate behavior at the individual and community levels. Besides the diminishing returns of a coercive, hard-law approach, the whole-of-society approach entails civil society being consciously inducted to maintain and enhance religious harmony and avoid the incivility spiral in which distrust, fear, and suspicion catalyze the breakdown and unraveling of Singapore's social fabric in the face of religious fervor and extremism. In countering the terrorist threat, the approach has evolved rapidly from a whole-of-government to a whole-of-society approach, a significant recognition that the security of the state, government, and society are intimately connected. The terrorism threat requires not just a security response but also a holistic one—one that seeks to align the “hearts and minds” of the faith communities to the societal objective of harmony and peace.

In the first part of this article, I frame the socio-legal regulation of social conduct and religious anxieties through the use of hard- and soft-law approaches. In the second part, I briefly describe the Singaporean religious landscape before discussing the phenomenon of homegrown terrorism, which has put Islam and Muslim Singaporeans in the spotlight. In the third part, I consider the confidence-building initiatives at the national level, focusing on the Declaration on Religious Harmony and the Community Engagement Program, which seek to develop better ties and build confidence between different groups in Singapore. The fourth part then examines the counter-radicalization efforts, centered on the Muslim community, to fortify the Singapore polity against the insidious effects of religious extremism. The fifth part builds on the discussion in the first part and explains the role and utility of the soft-law approach in the overall institutional effort to deal with the terrorism threat. The centrality and fragility of trust in engaging the racial and religious threats to public order and harmony are also explored. The sixth part concludes the article.

Hard- and Soft-Law Approaches in Regulation

In an age where religious extremism is a real and potent national security concern, public policy and legislation in a multireligious society have to strive to reflect the value and belief systems of citizens, including religious ones. This has to be inclusive with no particular set of religious beliefs discriminated or preferred. The regulatory paradox lies in that, for the state to remain neutral and secular in a multireligious polity, the state must regulate the religious realm as a mediator and adjudicator in the socio-political arena. Because the end goal of terrorists is to inflict terror and division on a community, a society's resilience and cohesion are vital. Coercive hard law is

grossly inadequate in winning the hearts and minds of a community. On the contrary, a muscular and legalistic approach to countering terrorism, which characterized Singapore's pre-9/11 approach, may well play into the terrorists' binary strategy of "us versus them."

Soft-law instruments can reinforce the policy imperative in which the growth of the common space need not be at the expense of one's religious identity and society's religious diversity.⁷ Crucial to the success of these efforts in winning the hearts and minds is whether the regulatory practices and societal attitudes inculcate a strong sense of the overarching common values and interests, which in time may evolve into accepted norms. These values and norms are a sustainable pathway toward uniting a plural society around a common purpose as it seeks to protect itself against the threat of social implosion by ensuring that the terrorist threat is not distorted by a moral panic and societal fear through producing an asymmetrical reaction within society. It recognizes the need for the government to work with and through the communities.

Ground-up initiatives are therefore critical. The ultimate objective is to create a safe, cohesive, and resilient society through imbibing a sense of belonging, understanding, and appreciation of co-nationals of other races, religions, and languages. Policymakers would do well to note that soft-law approaches can have a protective function like hard law and aid in the objective of reducing a society's vulnerabilities. There is less of a need to instill within the population a continual fear of terrorism, which inevitably strains the social fabric as well. To be sure, vigilance is required, but fear is counter-productive. Going forward, an even-handed mix of hard- and soft-law approaches in managing the terrorism threat provides a good combination of regulation, enforcement, and a basis for the inculcation of self-enforcing values and norms.⁸

In response to the threat of terrorism, governments have arrogated to themselves the availability of a variety of hard laws that they can use to deal with clear and present danger that terrorism poses.⁹ Hard law is generally understood as "legally binding obligations that are precise (or can be made precise through adjudication or the

7. Public space in Singapore is also often referred to as "common space." Such spaces are shared by all, regardless of affiliations. They are kept, to the fullest extent possible, race- and religion-free or neutral so that Singaporeans are not unnecessarily concerned or excluded from such spaces because of their subnational identities or affiliations.

8. See further elaboration in Eugene K. B. Tan, "From Clampdown to Limited Empowerment: Hard and Soft Law in the Calibration and Regulation of Religious Conduct in Singapore," *Law and Policy* 31 (July 2009): 351–79.

9. On the hard-law counterterrorism regime, see Eugene K. B. Tan, "Singapore," in *Comparative Counter-Terrorism Law*, ed. Kent Roach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 610–49.

issuance of detailed regulations) and that delegate authority for interpreting and implementing the law.”¹⁰ For example, antiterrorism legislations stipulate—in varying degrees of clarity and precision—the proscribed acts of commission and omission (obligations and compliance), the imposition of legally binding duties and obligations (accountability), and the punishment for transgression (sanctions). Although the coercive powers of hard law are useful in clamping down on real and present dangers, they also impose severe costs and unintended consequences. Given the nature of the terrorist threat as both existential and ideational, the structural power of hard law is often not only reactionary but also grossly inadequate as a means of pre-emptive, adaptive socialization and social learning prior to, during, and after a terrorist strike. Crucially, hard law does not help engender a resilient society.

On the other hand, the soft-law approach is less definitive and does not create enforceable rights and duties. With soft law popular and used to good effect in the public international law arena, policymakers are increasingly using soft law in domestic settings as a mode of regulation, especially where preventive measures are useful. It includes a variety of processes that attempt to set rules, guidelines, or codes of conduct that share the common trait of having nonlegally binding normative content that can have regulative, practical effects similar to hard law. Because soft law cannot be enforced by legal means, it cannot be relied upon as a basis for deterrence, enforcement action, and punitive sanctions. However, soft law is inherently flexible, possessing discursive power through its facilitative effort to establish normative standards and enable social learning. It seeks to reduce a harm, whether defined or even inchoate, through an analysis of risk and the development of appropriate norms and values that involves relevant stakeholders. This is particularly useful in situations of flux where persuasion and reflexive adjustment, rather than rigid adherence or enforcement, are needed.

The force of hard law lies in its deterrent power for those motivated by a self-absorbed avoidance of punishment. However, radicals and terrorists are not deterred by such methods. Soft law’s primary contribution is in creating a behavioral regime involving the key stakeholders that also has the benefit of being facilitative of efforts to internalize the norms embedded in hard law. For instance, the ideational standards or

10. Domestic legislation and international treaties are two tangible expressions of hard law. See further Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, “Hard and Soft Law in International Governance,” in *Legalization and World Politics*, ed. J. L. Goldstein, M. Kahler, R. O. Keohane and A.-M. Slaughter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 37. The discussion on the attributes of hard and soft laws in the remainder of this section is largely drawn from Tan, “From Clampdown to Limited Empowerment,” 355–57.

expectations first enunciated in soft-law mechanisms can form the basis on which the practical application of the hard law can subsequently acquire effectiveness, efficacy, and legitimacy. Soft law can also be understood as law in the embryonic stage of formation (that is, the precursor of emerging hard law) or as principles and norms that might eventually consolidate and contribute to the legal interpretation of hard law or become legally binding rules themselves. In this regard, soft law can help knowledge, norms, and values to be framed strategically and dovetail with existing normative frameworks. In this, soft law's strategic potential lies partly in its "soft power." Rather than resorting to threats (in essence, the use of hard law) or payments (bribes), soft power is the ability of a political entity to obtain what it wants by virtue of it being an attractive model.¹¹ In the pursuit of racial and religious harmony in Singapore, the soft-law approach is more likely to be seen as possessing legitimacy as it is more likely to secure buy-in from societal stakeholders than top-down governmental regulation would.

Specifically, soft-law mechanisms in dealing with the terrorism threat can be adapted for the purposes of winning the hearts and minds of people by persuading the relevant stakeholders that extremism, violence, and conflict are not the solutions. In Singapore's context, this means the government can use soft law to attract, socialize, and inculcate in the citizenry the requisite norms to buttress the imperative of ensuring that religion is not abused to sow discord, conflict, and violence.¹² These attributes of soft law can facilitate the socialization of desired behavioral norms, the formation of consensual knowledge, and a shared understanding of the terrorist threat and the necessary mindset and conduct to counter it.

Furthermore, soft law can also possess the regulative and constraining effect of hard law. The utility of soft law instruments is its transformative capacity in socializing stakeholders through a consensual and confidence-building process. More directly, soft law speaks to reason and understanding, strives to develop consensus, and encourages the internalization of desired values and interests. Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development help to demonstrate how soft law's iterative, quasi-prescriptive nature can engage cognitive and informed responses in developing a nuanced regulative response to a societal threat (see figure 1).¹³

11. Joseph Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

12. As the article will discuss, Singapore's soft-law instruments bear the heavy imprint of either being government-initiated, government-endorsed, or government-driven even if civil society is inducted as well.

13. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Stages and Moralization: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach," *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research,*

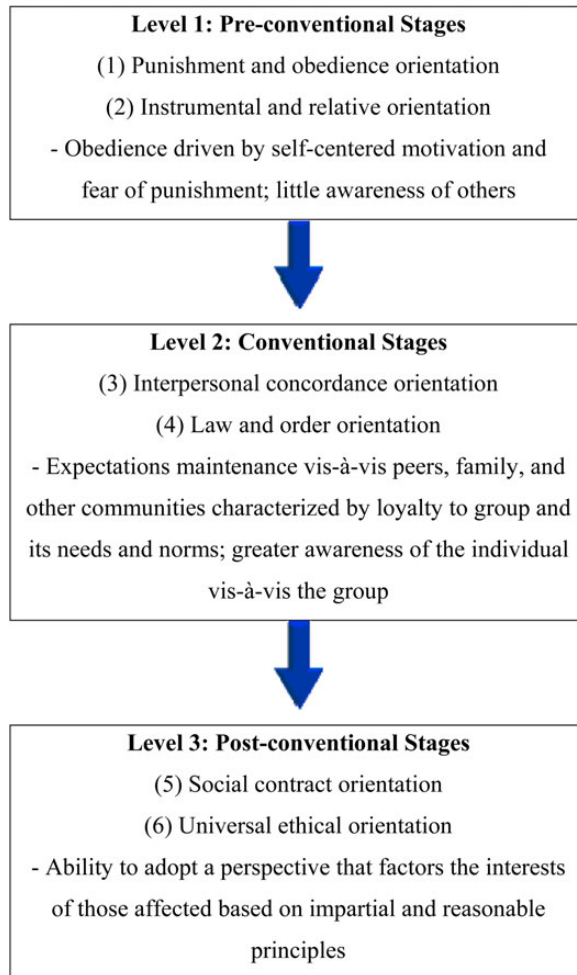


Figure 1 Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

Using Kohlberg's model, a hard-law approach tends to elicit reasoning and responses that are primarily egocentric, denominated in self-centered terms of avoiding punishment, compliance with an

and Social Issues, ed. T. Lickona (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1976). I recognize that Kohlberg's model has been criticized for its cultural and gender biases. On the former, critics have contended that Kohlberg's model may be culturally biased for its emphasis on ideals found primarily in Western cultures, such as individual rights and social justice. In this article, Kohlberg's model is utilized to illustrate how soft law's iterative, quasi-prescriptive nature can engage cognitive and informed responses in developing a nuanced regulative response to a societal threat.

authority, and group norms (or, levels one or two of Kohlberg's moral development). A soft-law approach, on the other hand, encourages the movement toward a level-three moral development in which a person is able to adopt a perspective that factors the interests of affected parties based on impartial and reasonable principles. When successfully imbibed, soft-law approaches result in society being able to attain the postconventional stage of moral reasoning in which critical and reflective reasoning are dominant. This exercising of moral suasion over the expected and desired conduct of a citizenry, religious communities, and the government before, during, and after a terrorist attack is a better means of ensuring that society does not implode.

Although we should not view hard and soft law in binary or antithetical terms in dealing with the terrorism threat, it is crucial nonetheless to distinguish between (1) laws that seek to prevent terrorist acts from taking place and (2) laws that seek to prevent a multiracial society from imploding after a terrorist attack. The objectives of law and policy differ for both courses of action, even though both are interdependent and underline the cohesion of a society as a necessary cooperative effort of various stakeholders. In preventing terrorist acts from taking place, a hard-law approach focusing on deterrence and sanctions would cohere with the preventative and command-and-control objectives targeted at a recalcitrant few that may also have the effect of marginalizing or even stigmatizing the larger community.

In contrast, a regulatory framework that seeks to prevent a multiracial, multireligious society from imploding after a terrorist attack has to emphasize and nurture a cooperative values-based culture and norms that instill ethical conduct of the masses, grounded in self-regulation, civic responsibility, and social resilience. Here, the intention is to build understanding, confidence, and trust. Hard law, however, cannot protect a society from nonrational fears; it can only seek to suppress those fears, but there are limits to this. Although soft law is no panacea either, it can help build bridges of normative consensus and have communities internalize the values necessary to hold society together. Rather than external regulation, Thio Li-ann argues that relational constitutionalism, "which is concerned with preserving durable relationships and cultivating tolerance and solidarity to preserve the quasi-constitutional norm of 'racial and religious harmony,'" can better address inter-religious tensions by dialogue and persuasion. This requires regulatory mechanisms going beyond rights to encompass civic virtues such as duty, tolerance, sensitivity, common sense, and forgiveness in serving the public good. Soft constitutional

law is particularly relevant and useful in maintaining racial and religious harmony.¹⁴

In Singapore, hard and soft laws are often used to complement each other to enlarge the state's capacity to regulate as well as socialize the citizenry. The putative cooperative element of the soft law approach can be deployed as a societal hedge against generalized mistrust and moral panic. The soft law approach pivots on the centrality of developing commitment to common values and ideals that all communities can identify with and use to guide their daily activities and interactions. The soft law instruments often provide guidance and elaborate on the interpretation of hard-law instruments. For soft law to successfully engage civil society, the values embodied in soft-law instruments must resonate with the intended audience.

Governments play an instrumental role in ensuring that such values are fortified against forces that undermine the commonalities shared by a polyglot society and the common humanity that binds faith communities.¹⁵ The overall deterrent effect of soft law derives from it facilitating the development of the citizenry's affective, emotional, and cognitive abilities to deal with the myriad complex issues and emotions that ethnic markers inflected by terrorism can arouse.¹⁶

The Faith Landscape—The Imperative of Harmony

Racial and religious harmony is one of Singapore's five Shared Values.¹⁷ Coexisting with the state's professed commitment to secularism, the state also acknowledges Singaporeans' religious faith as a major part of Singapore's cultural ballast. Although secularism is a cardinal principle of Singapore's political governance, the government

14. Thio Li-ann, "Relational Constitutionalism and the Management of Religious Disputes: The Singapore 'Secularism with a Soul' Model," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1, no. 2 (2012): 446–69.

15. Studies on terrorism and extremism have often pointed to the intractable and endemic conflicts between state and nonstate actors over the lack of equal citizenship and the power wielded by such actors. See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). I am grateful to a reviewer for emphasizing this.

16. A government media campaign in 2007 sought to reinforce the notion that Singapore's security and unity is a "shared mission for all." The tender notice (on file with author) stated that the advertising campaign should aim to "influence public perceptions at the broad ideological and psychological level, providing an emotive context to an understanding of Singapore's security environment."

17. Officially adopted in 1993, the Shared Values aim to consolidate the cultural essence of Singapore's multiracial society and contribute to Singapore's long-term growth as a distinctive Asian nation.

recognizes that religion and politics are not distinct spheres of influence and experience. It appreciates that religions tend to encompass comprehensive worldviews on all dimensions of human existence and are a powerful instrument to rally faith communities as well as a potential tool of protest against socioeconomic and political injustices, perceived or real.¹⁸ Even as the Singaporean state strives to keep religion and politics distinct and separate, it is also pragmatically alive to the fact that maintaining a watertight separation between these two realms is neither realistic nor sustainable. Yet, Singapore is not a dogmatic secular state. The government is fully cognizant of the power of religion to mobilize, to motivate, to enforce behavior, values, and norms among the faithful. The government has also partnered with religious groups in the social services sector. This brand of pragmatic and accommodative secularism has served Singapore well.¹⁹

In some respects, this pragmatic attitude toward religion reflects flexibility and responsiveness to the role of religion in Singaporean society. Rapid modernization in Singapore has not resulted in an apparent decline in the importance of religious beliefs, and the downgrading of importance of religious institutions (the secularization thesis) does not appear to be borne out in Singapore. Anecdotal evidence suggests a revivalism across all major faiths. While Singaporeans' increased religiosity per se is not a concern, it would be of concern to the government should Singaporeans interact less with Singaporeans of other faiths. Given its open economy and the ubiquity of new media access, Singapore is invariably exposed to the transnational phenomena of the rise of religious fundamentalism, powerful transnational associational pulls of renewed religiosity, and new forms of post-traditional/new age spirituality.²⁰

18. See, for example, Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

19. See further, Eugene K. B. Tan, "Keeping God in Place: The Management of Religion in Singapore," in *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, ed. Lai Ah Eng (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore, 2008), 55–82.

20. Since 9/11, religious fundamentalism across all faiths has been subjected to closer scrutiny by governments globally. On the global impact of fundamentalism, see Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Gerrie ter Haar and James J. Busuttill, eds., *The Freedom to Do God's Will: Religious Fundamentalism and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2003). On these developments, including the misuse of religion to morally justify terrorism and the rise of religious terrorism as a political force, see generally Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Martin E. Marty, "Our Religio-secular World," *Daedalus* 132, no. 3 (2003): 42–48; Pippa Norris

In response, the Singapore government maintains a watchful eye on external influences, and is prepared to move preemptively against any perceived threat to social cohesion and harmony.²¹ The government operates from the conservative and realist premise that racial and religious harmony cannot be taken for granted and that efforts have to be continually exerted to ensure that moderation and social responsibility prevails in the practice of one's faith. As such, the government seeks to keep the realms of politics and religion as separate and distinct as possible even if Singaporeans do not draw that distinction emphatically. In the last three decades, the religious identifier as part of a Singaporean's identity has become even more prominent. Although it would be misleading to equate increased religiosity of the Malay Muslims with Islamism (understood here as a political ideology supportive of Muslim political activism), the government's concern with the Malay Muslim way of life in recent years is all but apparent. The overarching fear and abiding sense of vulnerability, made more pronounced since the post-September 11 so-called "war on terror," ensure that close scrutiny, interventionist surveillance, and ultra-sensitivity to internal security concerns are hallmarks of the government's policy toward religion and the terrorism threat.

Singaporeans' religious affiliation has remained relatively stable over the last twenty-five years. Further, religious and racial group relations, pre- and post-September 11, 2001, are positive.²² Buddhists (33.3%) constitute the largest religious group, followed by Muslims (14.7%), no religion (17.0%), Christians (18.3%), Taoists (10.9%), and Hindus (5.1%).²³ Buddhism and Christianity in Singapore have experienced substantial growth in the last twenty-five years with better-educated Chinese more inclined toward Christianity. There is an emergent pattern of Christians being of "relatively higher social-economic status (in education, occupation, and income) and exerting an influence, politically, socially, and economically, far greater than the number they represent in the population."²⁴

and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

21. Michael Hill, "The Rehabilitation and Regulation of Religion in Singapore," in *Regulating Religion: Case Studies from Around the Globe*, ed. James Richardson (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004), 343–58.

22. See David Chan, *Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans: Attitudes on Race and Religion* (Singapore: Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2002 and 2003).

23. Figures are for residents (citizens and permanent residents) in Singapore; taken from the 2010 national census.

24. Eddie C. Y. Kuo, Jon S. T. Quah, and Tong Chee Kiong, *Religion and Religious Revivalism in Singapore* (Singapore: Ministry of Community Development, 1988), 11.

For the minority indigenous Malay community, racial and religious identities are not only simultaneously prominent but also conflated. Because 99.6 percent of Malay Singaporeans profess Islam, the government regards Malays synonymously as Muslims. The Muslim identity is treated as an integral, if not inalienable, part of the Malay identity. This double and interchangeable identities, “Malay/Muslim” in official Singapore discourse, distinguishes the Malay community and emphasizes their distinctiveness vis-à-vis the non-Malays. Within the community itself, it also nurtures a greater community self-consciousness of the double bond of race and faith.²⁵ This conflation of racial and religious identities constrains the full integration of Malay/Muslims in the Singapore Armed Forces and other security agencies. This stems from the government’s concern that, in the event of a conflict with its predominantly Muslim neighbors, primordial loyalties of ethnicity and religion will trump the civic and secular loyalties to the Singaporean nation.²⁶ This threat assessment is a significant, if latent, bone of contention between the government and the Muslim community.

Although it is misleading to equate the increased religiosity of the Muslim Singaporean community as sympathy with or support for the violent strand of Islamism, the government has always been concerned that primordial loyalties of faith and ethnicity would take precedence over civic and secular loyalties to the Singapore nation-state.²⁷ In particular, the government’s concern with the perceived, growing exclusivity of the Malay Muslim community was amplified with the discovery of homegrown Islamist terrorist suspects since 9/11.²⁸ This latent but persistent fear of Muslims as a Trojan horse has been heightened since 9/11, in tandem with Islamist terrorism being regularly assessed as a real, multifaceted, and

25. Consequently, there is a top-down enforced reduction of individual and subgroup differences within the Malay Muslim community and the convenient tendency to treat it as a monolithic entity.

26. On the “Trojan horse” dilemma in Singapore’s national service system, see Alon Peled, *A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multiethnic States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), ch. 3. See also the critique of the “culturalist approach” in Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman, “Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11: An Analysis of the Dominant Perspective,” in *Encountering Islam: The Politics of Religious Identities in Southeast Asia*, ed. Hui Yew-Foong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 335–75.

27. My use of “increased religiosity” in this article should not be understood as suggesting that prior to the 1980s, Muslim Singaporeans were not religious or not as religious as they are today. Instead, I use the term to describe changes in Muslim religious expressions such as dietary practices, dressing, and other religious observances that have become more pronounced since the 1980s.

28. Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism*, White Paper Cmd 2 of 2003, presented to Parliament by command of the President of the Republic of Singapore (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2003).

strategic threat in Singapore's locale in Southeast Asia.²⁹ This was further accentuated by the Washington Beltway's previously exaggerated concerns over terrorism in archipelagic Southeast Asia as the "second front" in the "global war against terror."³⁰

Religious issues pertaining to Islam in Singapore continue to present specific challenges to the government and are regularly profiled in the official discourse. From the 1990s onwards, given the strong accent of Islamic revivalism globally, including in Indonesia and Malaysia,³¹ the Singapore government paid even closer attention to the religious dimension of the Malay Muslim community life. In particular, the apparent re-Islamization in daily life—not just outward behavior but also inward attitudes and values—led to the government's primary concern of the potential formation of a closed Malay Muslim community. In contrast, the Malay Muslim community's self-perception is that its increased religiosity stems from a spiritual self-renewal rather than the insistence of a particularized Islamic system of values and ethics or vulnerability toward a militant, violent brand of *jihadism*. The very different perceptions of increased religious piety make the management of the terrorism threat challenging.

In the current security climate, increased Muslim religiosity and expression of conservatism have become securitized.³² Simply put, the terrorist threat from within is an explicitly national security issue, with Muslim Singaporeans' apparent susceptibility to radical and militant Islam being the key concern. Ever since the September

29. Peter Chalk and Carl Ungerer, *Neighborhood Watch: The Evolving Terrorist Threat in Southeast Asia* (Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2008); Sidney Jones, "Briefing for the New President: The Terrorist Threat in Indonesia and Southeast Asia," *Annals (AAPSS)* 618 (2008): 69–78.

30. The US State Department's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report for 2003 describes Southeast Asia as "an attractive theater of support and logistics" for Al-Qaida. The report is available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003> accessed on April 30, 2004. See also John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?" *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2002): 60–74.

31. On Islamic revivalism in Indonesia and Malaysia, see Greg Fealy, "Islam in Southeast Asia: Domestic Pietism, Diplomacy and Security," in *Contemporary Southeast Asia: Regional Dynamics, National Differences*, ed. Mark Beeson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 136–55; Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvath, eds., *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); Michael Laffan, "The Tangled Roots of Islamist Activism in Southeast Asia," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16, no. 3 (October 2003): 397–414; Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001).

32. On the process of securitization, see Alan Collins, *Security and Southeast Asia: Domestic, Regional, and Global Issues* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 5–8.

11, 2001, attacks and the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, Islam has come under even more scrutiny globally, Singapore included. Between the end of 2001 and early 2002, there were several rounds of arrests and detention of Ji and “self-radicalized” terrorist suspects in Singapore. Against the backdrop of the U.S.-led “global war against terror,” these arrests of “home-grown” terrorist suspects unsettled the Singaporean polity, with anecdotal evidence then suggesting that ethnic relations were strained, if not shrouded in suspicion. Then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew observed:

In keeping with a world-wide trend, over the last three decades many Muslims in Singapore and the region are becoming stricter in their dress, diet, religious observances, and even social interaction, especially with non-Muslims. Increasingly Muslim women will not shake hands with men. The generation of convivial and easy-to-get-along-with Muslim leaders in the region has given way to successors who observe a stricter Islamic code of conduct. My original concern was over the growing separateness of our Muslim community, as Singaporean Muslims tended to congregate for their social and extra-mural activities in their mosques, instead of in multi-racial community clubs. *What came as a shock was that this heightened religiosity facilitated Muslim terror groups linked to Al-Qaeda to recruit Singapore Muslims into their network.*³³

Muslim Singaporeans were themselves confronted by self-doubt and ambivalence. The backdrop of the government’s apprehensions over the loyalty of Muslim Singaporeans to Singapore, a long-standing issue, reflected a legacy of a lack of mutual trust. At the same time, the *tudung/hijab* (headscarf) controversy of 2002 unfolded and added to the strained political atmosphere.³⁴ In 2002, 122 Muslim organizations came together, as “a matter of conscience and national concern” and publicly condemned terrorism as being at odds with Islam.³⁵

The government had expressed its fears of the Muslim community’s perceived exclusion and self-segregation from Singaporean society on religious grounds. The government also worried about the

33. Lee Kuan Yew, Speech for the 1st Munich Economic Summit, Munich, June 7, 2002 (my emphasis). See further Lee’s views quoted in Mike Millard, *Jihad in Paradise: Islam and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004), 80–88.

34. The issue at stake was whether Muslim pre-pubescent female students should be permitted to wear the *tudung* in national primary schools. The students were suspended from school as their parents insisted on their daughters wearing the *tudung* in school. The Education Ministry explained that school uniforms reduced exclusiveness and promoted integration by sidelining differentiation on the basis of race, religion, or class. See also Rahman, “Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11,” 347–55.

35. See “Singapore Muslim Organizations Decry Terrorism in Name of Islam: Oct. 9 Statement Urges Singaporeans to Unite against Terrorism,” <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2002/October/20021011151324larocque@pd.state.gov0.9141504.html>.

negative impact the JI arrests would have on Singapore's multiracial and multireligious society. Unfortunately, these legitimate concerns were accompanied by unrelenting and uninformed public scrutiny over the tenability of Islamic practices and increased religiosity in Singapore, including questions over the overt symbols and signs of Muslim identity and beliefs, which hitherto did not arouse concern. In the January 2003 parliamentary debate on the "The *Jemaah Islamiyah* Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism" white paper, the discussion of the terrorist threat was revealing and notable for the articulation of a subtle moral panic that obliquely linked increased Islamic religiosity and perceived Malay Muslim separateness with increased susceptibility toward terrorism. The official articulation highlighted the concern with Muslims' supposed exclusionary practices and self-segregation and the formation of an isolated "micro-community" accompanied by the unilateral closing of common space. During this period, the minister in-charge of Muslim affairs remarked:

Practices of the Malay community, which have evolved naturally, became the subject of scrutiny. There was even some questioning as to whether these practices were desirable or otherwise. . . . The local context did not matter as we were swathed with exciting stories of terrorism and extremism prefaced by the word "Islamic" supplied by overnight experts. There were increased concerns and questions about the implications of overt symbols and signs of Muslim identity and beliefs. Some wondered why Muslims needed to consume food that was *halal* (or permitted) as though it was a radical behavioral departure. Observing religions practices became a short of shorthand for hovering at the edge of terrorism.³⁶

Such a state of affairs was clearly unsatisfactory.³⁷ The government realized that a different approach was needed.

Building Confidence: National Initiatives

The stark realization that interracial ties were not as healthy as they should be prompted the government to chart new directions to engender better interethnic understanding. In the heightened post-9/11 environment, the government was concerned that the social fabric, although strong, may not withstand the grievous impact of a terrorist attack in Singapore. In the aftermath of a terrorist attack in Singapore, social resentment and religious insecurity can

36. Yaacob Ibrahim, Speech by the minister for community development and sports and minister in-charge of Muslim affairs at the Wee Kim Wee seminar on Cross-Cultural Understanding, Singapore Management University, August 2, 2003.

37. See insightful discussion on the overemphasis on the theological dimension of terrorism in Rahman, "Issues on Islam and the Muslims in Singapore Post-9/11."

easily be unleashed through stereotyping, doubt, and prejudice. The pathway to hatred and violence was not unlikely if there was a chasm as to how to deal with the threats posed by terrorism. Increasingly cognizant that a coercive legal arsenal has its limitations, the government moved carefully to clothe the concept of tolerance in a more tangible manner. The initial national confidence-building efforts took two principal forms: the rapid formation of the Inter-Racial Confidence Circles (IRCCs, now known as Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles) in January 2002 at the constituency level across the island and the unveiling of the Declaration on Religious Harmony (DRH) in June 2003.

In stating the perimeters of religious conduct that is deemed moderate and nonthreatening, the DRH, available in four official languages, was a government-led initiative to educate and engage civil society on the acceptable norms in the practice of one's faith.³⁸ Previous efforts to this end focused on the religious elites. Although the DRH is a nonlegislative, nonenforceable document, the government-led efforts to craft a code of conduct were an attempt to exert moral suasion on the religious leaders and believers alike to practice moderation in their faiths, fully sensitive to the multireligious realities and secular constraints inherent in the Singapore polity. The notion of tolerance needed to be unpacked so that the rules of religious conduct are clearly laid out, shared, and understood by Singaporeans. With time, these principles could be internalized and develop into socio-political norms that would strengthen the secular and multireligious character of Singapore.

Although the first draft of the DRH³⁹ was provided by the state and subsequently worked on by selected religious elites, the intent was to induct one segment of civil society (namely, the religious elites) in generating consensus and buy-in on the ground rules. The drafting process of the DRH is also insightful. Led by a junior minister and a committee of parliamentarians of various faiths, the various national bodies of all major religious groups in Singapore were consulted on

38. The DRH reads: "We, the people in Singapore, declare that religious harmony is vital for peace, progress and prosperity in our multi-racial and multi-religious Nation. We resolve to strengthen religious harmony through mutual tolerance, confidence, respect, and understanding. We shall always

- Recognise the secular nature of our State,
- Promote cohesion within our society,
- Respect each other's freedom of religion,
- Grow our common space while respecting our diversity,
- Foster inter-religious communications,

and thereby ensure that religion will not be abused to create conflict and disharmony in Singapore."

39. The DRH was originally titled the "Code of Religious Harmony."

the draft. The discussion was initially conducted with the religious bodies individually. Inputs from the public were received through letters, e-mails, and the media. The ad hoc working group deliberated between October 2002 and February 2003. Subsequently, a revised draft was prepared, and representatives of all of the religious bodies reviewed the draft as a group. The draft was then submitted to the Inter-Racial Confidence Circle National Steering Committee, before final submission to the government in February 2003. Mindful of the sensitivities, the DRH working committee consulted all major religious groups in Singapore.⁴⁰ In June 2003, the DRH was unveiled, a tangible manifestation of the fledgling attempt at concretizing the guiding principles from which consensus and confidence building, as well as norm building, can evolve.⁴¹

Prior to the DRH, several principles of responsible religious conduct were first articulated in the “Maintenance of Religious Harmony” White Paper in the late 1980s.⁴² Although the focus of the parliamentary document was on the religious elites, the White Paper also reminded religious communities to exercise moderation and tolerance and to keep religion and politics as separate fields of human endeavor.⁴³ However, the government had then decided against a similar guidelines approach because it felt that it would be ineffective against a minority who would disregard a list of dos and don’ts. Instead, it preferred a hard-law approach and proceeded to enact the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. In contrast, the DRH expands on the White Paper and lays out for all faith believers the general principles without being unduly prescriptive. Bearing in mind the purpose of the objective of public education and confidence building, the avoidance of formalistic rules in preference for overarching principles and guidelines is a better approach.

40. The representatives came from the following faiths: Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism.

41. See further, Thio Li-ann, “Constitutional ‘Soft’ Law and the Management of Religious Liberty and Order: The 2003 Declaration of Religious Harmony,” *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (2004): 414–43. See also Tan, “From Clampdown to Limited Empowerment,” 363–65.

42. *Maintenance of Religious Harmony*, White Paper Cmd 21 of 1989, presented to Parliament by command of the President of the Republic of Singapore (Singapore: National Printers, 1989).

43. The White Paper also set out proposals for legislation to maintain religious tolerance and harmony in Singapore and for the establishment of the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act was a legislative product of the White Paper. For a reflection on this “groundbreaking piece of legislation” by the then home affairs minister, see S. Jayakumar, *Be at the Table or Be on the Menu: A Singapore Memoir* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2015), 112–14.

The DRH drafting process had the salutary effect of assuring the various faith communities of their role and presence in Singaporean society. Again, the DRH demonstrated the importance of a consultative and consensual process in dealing with matters of faith. More important, the DRH has crystallized the substantive norms on religious harmony and religious freedom in the Singaporean context for the faith communities' elites and followers alike.⁴⁴ Following the adoption of the DRH, the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle, consisting of representatives of all major faiths involved in the DRH consultation process, was formally established to build on the interfaith dialogue established in the earlier consultations and discussions. The retention of this grouping of religious elites as a consultation forum to guide efforts to promote the spirit of the DRH underlines the belief that the DRH needs to be a living document in which the norms and values are practiced in form and substance. The government has also urged religious bodies and schools to recite the DRH annually on Racial Harmony Day (July 21).

The Community Engagement Program

The state continues to assert itself as an indispensable intermediary in facilitating better inter-racial and inter-religious understanding. This ensures that the government continues to exert a measure of control and influence over issues of race and religion. Such a development is not surprising. The state's dominance in ethnic relations, through its top-down approach, has affected the nature of inter-racial and inter-religious understanding. Genuine interethnic understanding cannot be engendered by artificially induced interactions. Yet the abiding unease and fear that social cohesion and resilience is fragile prompted the government to explore other means of enhancing inter-ethnic relations. In the aftermath of a terrorist attack, especially by homegrown perpetrators, the primary concern for policymakers is the potential backlash against the Muslim community and the unraveling of Singapore's social fabric. This overriding fear took on added urgency following the 7/7 London bombings by homegrown British perpetrators in July 2005.

The prime minister had acknowledged that the multifaceted challenges posed by the post-9/11 security environment is "by far the most serious [security problem] that we have faced since the communist problem."⁴⁵ More significant, since the latter half of 2005, the characterization of the terrorist threat has moved away from the somewhat

44. Arguably, the Singapore courts could take cognizance of the DRH in constitutional litigation involving the constitutional right to religious freedom and the ambit of the right to profess, practice, and propagate one's faith.

45. "Not the Terror, but the Fallout," 1-2.

overindulgent, exclusive, and unenlightening focus on the “right, moderate Islam.” There is now official recognition that maintaining social cohesion and resilience requires a two-way interactive process at various levels: between state and civil society, between political and religious elites, between religious elites and their followers, between elites and followers of the various faiths.⁴⁶ In the clearest demonstration of the need for Muslims and non-Muslims to take collective responsibility, invest, and be engaged in enhancing social cohesion, the prime minister issued a timely corrective:

[W]e must know that this [terrorism] is *not a Malay-Muslim problem*. This is a *national problem* and non-Muslims also have to play your part, for example, by preserving the space for minorities in the majority-Chinese society by upholding the ideals of meritocracy and equal opportunity and treatment, regardless of race, language and religion and by clearly distinguishing the small number of extremists who are a threat to us from the majority of moderate, rational, loyal Muslim Singaporeans with whom we work together to tackle a shared problem.⁴⁷

It was in this context that the Community Engagement Program (CEP) was launched in February 2006.⁴⁸ The CEP is now the centerpiece of the endeavor to ensure that Singapore has adequate social capital and social resilience to withstand threats to its social fabric posed by terrorist acts. The CEP seeks to widen and deepen the linkages among Singaporeans at multiple levels by involving more people through bottom-up initiatives for civil society ownership and building on the networks developed by the IRCCs.

Before the CEP's launch, the public discourse of the terrorist threat was inflected with a palpable moral panic that linked increased Islamic religiosity and perceived Malay Muslim separateness with increased susceptibility toward terrorism. The key challenge since 9/11 is to adeptly manage the Malay Muslim Singaporeans' increased religiosity and their perception of being under siege, as well as the non-Muslim apprehension, fears, and misunderstanding of Islam and Muslim Singaporeans. The latest emphasis on reaching out to the “Muslim civil society” seeks to manage the perceived exclusivism within the Malay Muslim community.⁴⁹ This outreach is a subset of

46. In this article, “resilience” is understood broadly as society's ability to resist violent extremism. It also includes the ability of a society to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a terrorist attack.

47. Speech by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Community Engagement Programme Dialogue, February 9, 2006. (Emphasis mine)

48. See the CEP portal, “Singapore United” at <http://www.singaporeunited.sg>. See also *Singapore United: The CEP Journey 2006–2008* (Singapore: Ministry of Home Affairs CEP Secretariat, 2009).

49. I use the term “Muslim civil society” for the community of believers of Islam, including the religious teachers and leaders. Although Islam does not separate the

the larger ongoing attempt to involve and engage civil society in dealing with religious extremism, ignorance, and prejudice through regular interfaith dialogue, confidence building, and the establishment of desired norms in the practice of one's faith.

The CEP mobilizes Muslim and non-Muslim communities to work together in tackling the terrorist threat.⁵⁰ Tolerance, manifested in the "live and let live" dictum, is inadequate. Although draconian legislation may be apt in the event of a crisis, such legislation does not assist in the building of interethnic ties during peaceful conditions. Nor does it help society to get back on its feet in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. Enforcing draconian legislation is reactionary with little didactic and normative value. The Singapore government believes in the utility and necessity of coercive legislation. It also emphasizes that the Muslim community practices its faith in the context of a multiracial society with moderation as the defining attribute. But the government is also aware that legislation alone is grossly insufficient in keeping the deleterious effects of violent radicalism and social consequences of a terrorist attack at bay.

Initiatives and Endeavors in Counter-Radicalization

Even as the government described the DRH and CEP as civil society-led nationwide endeavors, there was also the impetus to have community-led efforts. Congruent with the "pre-emptive strike" ("nip the problem in the bud") governance philosophy that is the hallmark of the Singapore government in security matters, this urgent and renewed push toward the forging of national resilience in the new security environment entails that the government engage civil society as a partner and stakeholder. This whole-of-society push is the objective even as the whole-of-government approach is still the dominant strand in the counter-terrorism narrative and strategy.

In the battle of ideas and for the hearts and minds of believers, civil society has a key role to facilitate the development of overlapping consensus on the nature and content of religious conduct in a secular, multiracial society. In particular, the centrality of civil society reiterates the

religious from the socio-political realms, it is possible to conceive of the faithful as constituting the space between state and family in a secular state. It is in this space where society resides and where the Islamic faith community debates and negotiates with the Singaporean state (whether through MUIS or not) on matters concerning their faith and state policies. The Muslim civil society is, of course, not monolithic.

50. See the CEP's "Singapore United" portal at <http://www.singaporeunited.sg>. See also Asad-ul Iqbal Latif, *Hearts of Resilience: Singapore's Community Engagement Programme* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011).

fact that the state cannot unilaterally impose its view on a faith community's desired practices. Instead, it highlights the patent need for and commitment to dialogue, cooperation, and trust. Various efforts to engage civil society, particularly the Muslim community, stem from the overarching themes of promoting moderation and a distinctive Muslim Singaporean identity as a bulwark against religious-inspired terrorism. In particular, this concerted effort toward engaging the Muslim community, albeit through the MUIS as the dominant interlocutor, authorizes the promotion of an autochthonous practice of Islam.⁵¹ Emphasis is placed on religious moderation, a sensitive recognition of Singapore's multiracialism, and the need for the Muslim private space not to encroach onto or reduce the common space. The promotion of Islamic moderation and inter-religious understanding is buttressed by the central concerns of social cohesion and religious tolerance.

Following the JI arrests, the initial characterization of the terrorist threat facing Muslim Singaporeans was one of "radical versus moderate" Islam and the imperative of the "moderate path."⁵² Moderation is understood to mean that Muslims ought not interpret and practice Islam narrowly and rigidly. It also requires Muslims to speak up against co-religionists who advocate intolerance and extremism to ensure that these views did not gain legitimacy and currency by default as a consequence of the silence of the moderate majority. Mindful that the fate of terrorist ideology lies with the Muslim community, the Singapore government, through MUIS, advocates the need for a "moderate, mainstream Muslim" community. The government's clarion call is for Muslim Singaporeans to inoculate themselves and their community against radical ideologies while undermining the theological legitimacy of the beliefs and actions espoused by terrorists and radicals.⁵³ Although the public discourse retains the self-limiting and unenlightening trope of moderate versus radical Islam, a parallel

51. To reiterate, MUIS is a statutory board tasked with regulating Muslim religious affairs and to advise the government in matters relating to Islam. For a further discussion of the points raised in this section, especially MUIS' effort to forge a distinctive Muslim-Singaporean identity, see Tan, "From Clampdown to Limited Empowerment," 366–68.

52. But see the longitudinal national *Survey on Social Attitudes of Singaporeans*, which indicated that Muslim Singaporeans are "moderate" in their religious views and practice of their faith.

53. In discussing multiculturalism as a necessity and a constitutionally entrenched obligation, the then Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong also supported the moderation discourse: "The recommended solution is not to outcast it [fundamentalist Islam], but to moderate it"; see the chief justice's speech, "Culture and Legal Practice," presented at the International Bar Association Conference Showcase Session, Singapore, November 15, 2007.

focus is on a broad-based, community approach in advancing inter-religious tolerance, understanding, and confidence.

This unrelenting emphasis on moderation is intimately connected with the urgency to mold the Muslim Singaporean identity as one that is not only congruent with accepted Islamic values but also in sync with progressive attributes of Singaporean society. In MUIS's February 16, 2007 sermon, moderation was explained in the following manner:

We must understand and internalize these two principles [*Ath-Thawabit*, or those that are fixed and unchangeable forever, and *Al-Mutaghaiyirat*, or those that can be changed and suited for different times and place]. Only by understanding it can we avoid from being extremists who interpret Islam from a very narrow viewpoint. And by understanding them, we can also avoid from (sic) slipping into the path of liberal interpretation of Islam. This is the moderation that Islam wants. Make this moderation our way of life. Make this moderation as an identity for our community. Because only on this moderation will our community be an example to others, a community of just and be (sic) a witness to others.⁵⁴

Likewise, MUIS has mobilized mosques to engage Muslim youths to reduce their susceptibility to extremist ideology. Youth development officers are deployed in mosques to offer mentoring and befriender services to youths. The overarching aim is to encourage Muslim youths to embrace a path of rationality and moderation in their socio-religious life with emphasis on personal and social responsibility.

Singapore Muslim Identity Project

To this end, the MUIS actively promotes the Singapore Muslim Identity (SMI) as encapsulating the moderate dimension of the Islamic faith for a Muslim Singaporean. MUIS embarked on the SMI project in early 2005 to impress upon Muslim Singaporeans the need for an autochthonous Muslim Singaporean identity and way of life. Such a "religiously profound" and "socially progressive" identity is contextualized to the prevailing socio-political and economic environment. This is now embodied in the "ten desired attributes" of Singapore's "Muslim community of excellence" (see figure 2). These attributes ostensibly seek to help Muslim Singaporeans understand their dual roles and identities as Muslims and citizens.

Through the SMI, MUIS promotes the practice of Islam in Singapore as one that is cognizant of the religious pluralism within the context of a secular state. By concretizing the virtues and aspirational norms

54. This MUIS sermon was titled "Forging the Singapore Muslim Identity."

1. Holds strongly to Islamic principles while adapting itself to changing context
2. Morally and spiritually strong to be on top of the challenges of modern society
3. Progressive, practices Islam beyond forms/rituals and rides the modernization wave
4. Appreciates Islamic civilization and history, and has good understanding of contemporary issues
5. Appreciates other civilizations and is self-confident to interact and learn from other communities
6. Believes that good Muslims are also good citizens
7. Well-adjusted as contributing members of a multi-religious society and secular state
8. Be a blessing to all and promotes universal principles and values
9. Inclusive and practices pluralism, without contradicting Islam
10. Be a model and inspiration to all

Figure 2 Ten desired attributes of Singapore's Muslim community of excellence (with respect to socio-religious life).

of a Muslim Singaporean, the SMI is an endeavor to craft a desired Islamic Singaporean identity that will not be overwhelmed by the appeals of competing and disparate Muslim ideas and identities imported from overseas, notwithstanding Islam's Arabic roots and continuing influence. The nuanced message is that Muslims are not being forced into a false choice between being Muslims and Singaporeans. This conscious amplification of a unique Singaporean Muslim identity urges the recognition that there is no fundamental incompatibility of Singaporean and Muslim identities.

The promotion of the SMI predates 9/11 and should be seen as an integral part of the government's effort to grow the common space. At that time, the government noted that growing Muslim religiosity could pose problems if it resulted in its segregation and exclusion from the larger society. The SMI seeks to pre-empt the inevitable contestation and doubts within the Muslim community over national identity and religious identity by asserting that both identities are complementary and not mutually exclusive. Such exhortatory efforts are to be welcomed, although the messaging needs to be extended to the non-Muslim community. For the true demonstration that Muslim Singaporeans can be confident of their place in

Singaporean society is to ensure that discrimination on grounds of race or religion, however subtle, is not tolerated. Key government policies must be congruent with efforts at social cohesion. So long as the perceptions and/or vestiges of suspicion of the Malay Muslim community persist, the pathways toward inclusion, cohesion, and resilience will be problematic and contested.⁵⁵

Mosques have been tasked to engage Muslim youths and reduce their susceptibility to extremist ideology. Youth development officers are deployed in mosques to offer mentoring and befriender services to youths. The overarching aim is to encourage Muslim youths to embrace a path of rationality and moderation in their socio-religious life with emphasis on personal and social responsibility.⁵⁶ MUIS's wide-ranging efforts in this regard remind us of the late Clifford Geertz's prescient observation that global Islam was "losing definition and gaining energy."⁵⁷

Muslim civil society efforts to counter radical and violent Islamist ideology are also more evident in the past decade. Of note is the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) formed in 2003 and comprising some thirty *ustaz* (Islamic scholars) who have provided voluntary religious and rehabilitation counseling as part of the overall rehabilitation process to the JI detainees and their families to correct their misinterpretation of Islam.⁵⁸ Alongside MUIS and other Muslim organizations, the RRG has reached out to the public to explain the misuse and abuse of Islamic teachings and concepts by terrorists. To counter the extremist exploitation of religion, governmental efforts are grossly inadequate. It is of little surprise therefore that the Muslim religious elites, with their authority, scholarship, and standing, are assiduously inducted in the effort not to cede the middle ground to the radicals.

Engendering Norms in Secular and Religious Realms

Given that terrorism is an asymmetric threat, a multifaceted response that is cognizant of the societal complexities inherent in a multicultural polity is required. The tendency to manage the terrorist threat through a harsh top-down regulatory regime often promotes executive power and valorizes state's imperatives. Mindful that a muscular, knuckle-duster response in faith matters can do more harm than

55. See further, Eugene K.B. Tan, "Singapore" (country study), in *Keeping the Faith: A Study of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in ASEAN* (Jakarta: Human Rights Resource Centre, 2015), 416–80.

56. Speech by MUIS President Mohamad Alami Musa at the Mosque Leaders Investiture Ceremony, March 5, 2006.

57. Clifford Geertz, "Toutes Directions: Reading the Signs in an Urban Sprawl," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 3 (1989): 291–306.

58. See the RRG website at <http://www.rrg.sg>.

good, the government has endeavored to have at its disposal as wide a range of regulatory and enforcement options as possible. With these powers, the government can respond sensitively to threats originating in the religious realm by calibrating the most appropriate response vis-à-vis the threat posed. This is notwithstanding that the realms of the secular and the sacred cannot always be demarcated with precision.

Singapore's overall approach to terrorism and religious extremism is premised on racial and religious harmony as the "fundamental basis for our social stability, cohesion and security."⁵⁹ Given the overriding concern with security and the fear of religious conflict as a potent source of conflict, there are several key legislations that provide a variety of options as part of the enforcement arsenal in dealing with individuals and groups in the religious realm that pose a public order threat.⁶⁰ Despite the government's preparedness to use the various enforcement options afforded to it, the long-standing terrorism threat has given grounds for serious reconsideration of the effectiveness of such hard-law measures. Legislation alone cannot deal with all aspects of religious radicalism, bigotry, and nihilism. This is particularly so when the battle is not about law enforcement but one that is fundamentally concerned with winning the hearts and minds of believers and confidence building across communities.

In the immediate aftermath of the initial rounds of JI arrests, the government had adopted a privatized approach to what is essentially an existential threat. The collective security approach, which hitherto had laid the substratum for stable ethnic relations in Singapore, was sidelined. Instead, the Malay Muslim community bore the brunt of the concern and responsibility. The community was, for all intents and purposes, held solely responsible for the radicalization of a small minority of Muslims. Such a portrayal of the community being at risk would only make matters worse. This dominant narrative unfairly consigns and insists that full-fledged citizens, who are Muslims, to wear their religious identity before all other identities and loyalties. Although the government sought to rally the Muslim community into action, this privatized approach had the unintended effect of marginalizing the mainstream community, thereby threatening mutual security and undermining ethnic relations.

However, the government quickly realized that such an approach would neither help to isolate the terrorists nor ensure that the terrorist ideology did not acquire wider support. Given the nature of the

59. "The Meaning and Importance of the Rule of Law," keynote address by then Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security, and Law Minister S. Jayakumar at the International Bar Association Rule of Law Symposium, Singapore, October 19, 2007.

60. This is further discussed in Tan, "Keeping God in Place, 55–82.

terrorist threat and its dependence on a sympathetic constituency to draw support and recruits to the cause, the nondiscriminating, clamping-down strategy more often than not marginalizes, if not alienates, the very bedrock of the Muslim community that is depended upon to form the bulwark against creeping radicalization. Furthermore, given that people and governments have to cooperate to defeat terrorism, policymakers have to fortify and prepare society by having all communities work together to ensure that society does not unravel in the aftermath of a terrorist strike through mutual suspicion, distrust, and collateral violence. Hence, the preference is for a community-wide or a whole-of-society approach.

Isolating the terrorists, both ideologically and on religious grounds, is the dominant approach now. Consequently, the overwhelming hard-law emphasis has conceded space for a soft-law approach, recognizing that the terrorism threat needs a collective and holistic response from governments and societies alike. The previous, narrow framing of terrorism as being a Malay Muslim problem was abandoned. Terrorism is now framed as a “national problem,” requiring a solution in which all Singaporeans, regardless of their racial and religious allegiance, have a role to play, although the accent is still on the Muslim community taking the lead.

The aspiration in the soft-law approach is that it provides a process, a structure for social learning and cooperation. In addition, the soft law’s “operating system” seeks to imbue a disposition, rather than a world view, for collective sensitivity and sensibility among stakeholders. These are the way stations to the development of trust and confidence at the grassroots level. In turn, this provides the foundation for successful norm diffusion, socialization, and reproduction. In a generalized trust environment, the preference is for common ground over confrontation.⁶¹ The process of seeking common ground requires deliberation, which also functions as a coping or quasi-regulatory mechanism in dealing with uncertainty. In turn, deliberation requires dialogue, compromise, and consensus.

Trust remains a fundamental attribute in the meaningful regulation of religious anxieties and the state’s response to the terrorist threat. Moreover, the strategic thrust to leverage on the capacity of civil society in thwarting the terror threat patently needs to be bottom-up if sustainable bonds are to be developed. The official logic and reasoning behind the *raison d’être* of the various policy initiatives, while rational and seemingly persuasive, do not mask the fact that

61. As Uslaner notes, generalized trust is about bridge building to people who are different from us and provides a basis for tolerance and cooperation: Eric M. Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

the strategic mindset of national security considerations inherently requires the mutual trust between government and the Malay Muslim community and between the different ethnic communities.

As de facto standard-setting and norm-engendering mechanisms, soft-law instruments can help ordinary citizens internalize the virtues of moderation and coexistence. Both hard- and soft-law approaches seek to weaken terrorism's appeal and currency. Hard law represents the coercive dimension, whereas soft-law's signaling function points to the relevance and appeal of socio-political values. The DRH and SMI speak of a normative, desired state of society undergirded by a principled motivation of establishing what is considered right, appropriate, and fitting in a socially persuasive and politically legitimate way. In this way, social control and social order can be maintained and enhanced. There is now better appreciation of the soft-law approach in engaging Singaporeans on the merits of building interethnic bonds and understanding to counter mutual suspicion and doubt. The soft-law approach is complementary and helps to make up for the inherent limitations of hard law.

Being pre-emptive in approach, soft-law instruments such as codes of conduct and best practices, when properly internalized, encourage and facilitate compliance. Although soft laws do not specifically deter terrorists from their objectives, they do constrain the terrorists' ability to harm society directly. In many respects, the conscious use of soft law is a considered attempt to increase the "harmony quotient" of Singaporeans.⁶² Given the threat assessments, the hard-nosed security approach pivoting on counterterrorism measures persists. Singapore's prime minister put squarely the inherent vulnerability and the emphatic challenge facing the country:

The gravest threat to our harmony is a terrorist attack here. Such an attack will put our ethnic relations under severe strain. This is what happened in Britain after the London bombings last July. . . . If ever there is an attack in Singapore, it will severely damage not just our physical infrastructure, but also the harmonious ethnic relations that underpin our existence as a nation. This is why in Singapore we have worked hard to reinforce inter-faith awareness and understanding, so that in a crisis the community network will hold our society together.⁶³

The jury is still out as to whether the recent policies and initiatives will be successful in promoting religious moderation within the Muslim community and enhancing social resilience.

62. Eugene K.B. Tan, "Norming Moderation in an 'Iconic Target': Public Policy and the Regulation of Religious Anxieties in Singapore," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 4 (December 2007): 443–62.

63. Speech given by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the official opening of the Harmony Centre at An-Nahdah Mosque, October 7, 2006.

Given that suicidal terrorists are unlikely to be deterred by coercive hard law or by “persuasive” soft law, the operational utility of soft law for law enforcement agencies lies in the likelihood that those who have imbibed the values and norms will be more likely than not to whistle-blow on or restrain those who might engage in activities that can undermine societal harmony. Thus, the Malay Muslim community is expected to take the lead in community policing to counter the ideological traction of extremism and the glorified use of violence, especially the “online DIY extremism” variant that is more insidious and difficult to survey and detect by the authorities.⁶⁴ Further, by privileging moderation and cooperation, as well as benchmarking and compliance, the DRH and SMI tacitly co-opt civil society to be the trip wire against radicals and terrorists. Even as the DRH and SMI need to acquire deeper resonance among Singaporeans, it is crucial that these mechanisms should not foster the cynicism that they instrumentally aid the security agencies’ surveillance of the religious sphere. In many respects, although the DRH and SMI have a potential securitizing effect, they also represent putative empowerment in which the various stakeholders can play an active part in forging resilience.

Conclusion

Terrorism per se is not an existential threat to Singapore. Instead, it is the mindless, knee-jerk reactions to it. Confidence building is needed to ensure that Singapore builds its stock of adequate social capital and resilience to withstand threats to its social fabric posed by terrorism threats and acts. As no counter-radicalization strategy would be able to ensure no sign-ups to violent extremism, any expectation of a risk-free society in the terrorism context is misplaced. Absolute security is not achievable, and policymakers must be frank about that. In crafting their overall response to the terror threat, the political leadership and policymakers need to be fully aware of the reality that terrorist threats have been used as a convenient excuse in other countries for potentially oppressive policy initiatives, disguised as being essential for a safer and secure society.

Since 9/11, religion and national security have been even more intimately linked. Religion and state security are taken seriously in Singapore, although there has been no overt religious conflict since Singapore’s hurried independence in August 1965. In some respects, 9/11 and its aftermath have driven home the message that “religious-inspired” threats to national security are best dealt with by not

64. See “Don’t Dismiss Any Sign of Self-radicalism,” *The Straits Times*, July 12, 2010.

indiscriminately clamping down on religion. Even as national security comes under threat, the better approach is to ensure that citizens' religious identities remain secure. Such a paradoxical approach also entails that civil society play a bigger role in ensuring that the state and religion are both secure. In short, looking at religion merely as a security threat is manifestly inadequate in keeping both state and society safe.

The role of civil society is crucial. Civil society can be meaningfully inducted to enhance a society's capacity to deal with the harm and infuse legitimacy and secure confidence in the measures taken. The state cannot interfere in religious practices even as it promotes moderation within faith communities. It would be remiss to mention the importance, in the Singaporean context, of the role of non-Muslims. Confidence building does not happen through the efforts of Muslims only. Going forward, societies such as Singapore need to calibrate their responses to terrorism and the threats in a manner that delicately balances vigilance and surveillance, resilience vis-à-vis paranoia and panic, vigorous law enforcement and a Big Brother-like state.

Any counterterrorism policy (which more often than not puts the state at the center) or social resilience effort will only work if Muslims and non-Muslims alike work as full citizens. With the security accent in Singapore being on "self-radicalization," tackling the more conservative, isolated, or misled variants of Islam will require more soft power than hard power.⁶⁵ For Singapore and its Muslim community, the well-being of Singapore will have to revolve around the substantive acceptance of multiple identities through a balanced approach of two realms that are important in the life of a Muslim: the transnational and the national. Too much of the former will heighten secular anxieties and raise questions about their loyalty and commitment to secular Singaporean values. Too much of the latter may be perceived by the Muslims themselves as their dissociation from their religious moorings.

This commitment to and acceptance of multiple identities and a pluralism of values is a necessary pathway for all Singaporeans to live up to their secular duties without sacrificing faithfulness to their faith. It may be a cliché, but a balanced approach is vital and sustainable because it ensures the meaningful participation of Muslims in all facets of national life as full-fledged citizens. On their own, governments and civil society cannot defeat terrorism. It is this multistakeholder approach that must inform and drive the effort for an effective and sustainable bulwark against radicalization and the forces that seek to divide and destroy our humanity.

65. As of the end of September 2015, nine self-radicalized Singaporeans have been arrested and detained.